

Home

Today's News

News Archive

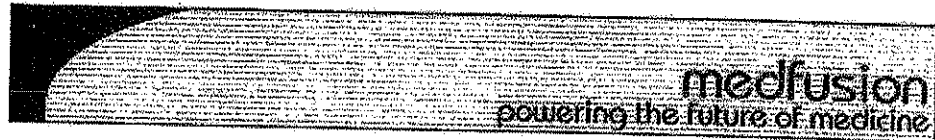
Current Issue

Quick Poll

Media Kit

Subscribe

Search



### This payer thinks the unthinkable: collaboration

When Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield surveyed its physician participants two years ago, it got an earful. "The docs all said what a hassle it is to do business with us," recalls Augusta Kairys, vice president of provider relations at the Pittsburgh-based plan, which covers 2.1 million members.

Highmark had provided some electronic connectivity for physician participants, Kairys says, but the effort "was very fragmented. We used fax, telephone touch tone phone and some Web. We knew we needed to get all the information in one place."

After listening to the focus groups, Highmark also learned another lesson. The plan knew that—despite its large market share of 65% of the insurance business in Western Pennsylvania—it needed to deploy technology that other competing plans could use. "We couldn't be proprietary," Kairys says. "The physicians told us they wanted more collaboration."

That's why Highmark struck a deal with Boston-based NaviMedix Inc. The company develops Web-based software that manages interactions between physicians and insurance plans. Highmark, by partnering with NaviMedix, could enable its participating physicians to communicate with four other payers in the New York and Pennsylvania markets already in the software company's fold.

Since Highmark launched the Web-based service in early 2000, the number of transactions conducted has grown dramatically, Kairys says. Some 14,000 Highmark physicians have enrolled to use the NaviMedix system, conducting an average of about 275,000 transactions each month. The most popular transactions are eligibility and benefits inquiries followed by claims status checks.

Physicians also are able to submit claims directly through the service, seek referral authorizations, look up fees and codes, and review the insurer's medical policies. "Our ultimate goal is to have all transactions and functions online," Kairys says.

To access the services, physicians either log on the Highmark site, highmark.com, which links to NaviMedix, or they go directly to NaviMedix.com.

But NaviMedix sometimes has a hard time selling payers on its services. Despite the convenience online systems offer to physicians, some plans balk at using the NaviMedix system, concedes Tom Morrison, vice president of marketing. That's because they're used to dealing with claims clearinghouses that submit data to them via electronic data interchange.

"Plans have an EDI orientation," he says. "They think it's the only way to communicate electronically. But EDI is limited. It's why authorizations are done mostly with faxes. EDI is good for claims, but not much else."

But Morrison sees health care economics working in NaviMedix's favor. Health care inflation will spark even more complexity in plan options, he predicts. "Employers will demand it," he says. "We will see even more complex options, such as high-deductible

HILL APP--004

AHM-HIGH 0069

HMOs. But it will make the claims process even more complex. It will be very hard for physicians without a good connectivity vehicle to compete."

© 2002 The Thomson Corporation and Technology in Practice. All rights reserved. *Privacy Policy*

**HILL APP--005**

**AHM-HIGH 0070**